



Fellow White People, Let's Unpack This

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Those who know me, know I love using the phrase, “Let’s unpack that.” When a friend is sharing a trouble or worry from their personal life, I immediately begin with, “Ooh, we need to unpack this.” It is my way of showing interest, really leaning in, and trying to address the root.

When I began on the path toward anti-racism and toward examining my whiteness, I had to get comfortable being uncomfortable – lean in, and try to address the root. I had to greet feelings of shame, defensiveness and nervousness, and encourage them to take a seat because we were going to be here a while. It’s important to use the same approach that I share with others when things are hard: I need to unpack this.

Unpacking shame means addressing my underlying thoughts: Why didn’t I start sooner? How have I benefited? Perpetuated? Ignored? In college while reading *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander, I expressed my disbelief that I could not have known and reddened with shame as my TA reminded me that I could have known, and that my privilege afforded me ignorance.

Unpacking defensiveness means addressing the ways in which my identity has not matched the impact of my actions. It means admitting I have centered myself in conversations about race. Unpacking my defensiveness means admitting to times where I may have played the “well-intentioned, progressive white woman.” It means remembering that my work as a justice advocate does not give me a better understanding than someone with lived experience.

Unpacking nervousness means accepting that I have made and will make mistakes, but that worrying about messing up inappropriately centers myself in the work. Unpacking my nervousness means opening up to, and welcoming, comments and criticism of how to do better. It means being grateful for instruction from my Black loved ones, friends, and colleagues, but also not relying on them to deliver the information that is available in many resources.

Fellow white people, come “unpack things” with me. Our Black neighbor, our indigenous neighbor, our nonwhite neighbor is, and has been, hurting

from the racism in which we participate. Perhaps recent events have encouraged us to seek more information; let's not allow discomfort to prevent us from doing the work or continuing the journey. Let discomfort remind us of the emotion and exhaustion tied to the Black experience in this country. Let's acknowledge that privileges afforded by whiteness have allowed many of us to avoid these feelings of shame or guilt. Let's do this work without expectation of thanks, because it is our responsibility as people of faith to do so.

I am called by my faith towards anti-racism. I will be traveling this path the rest of my life. There will be times for me to sit and listen, and times for me to stand and educate. I am committed to making this world a safer and more just place for every Black person. I still have much to learn, and a long way to go. Let's unpack this.

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